Work-Life Balance Factors in the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

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Abstract

The analysis of the problem of work- life balance (WLB) expanded through the last few years, being transformed from the typically female problem, connected with family life, into more general issue, concerning all the employees. The problem occurs especially with reference to the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which dominate in the enterprise structure in the world. At the same time these organizations represent relatively low standards in terms of realization of the basic rules of HR management, including WLB. It is caused not only by the system and organizational limitations, but it is also a result of a lack of the employers' awareness in relation with a given area. It also seems to be interesting that the peculiarity of the functioning of a SMEs may be recognized as a factor fostering efficient management of WLB (greater flexibility in decision- making process, greater flexibility in terms of structural and economic matters), but at the same time size of the company can be recognized as a factor creating an obstacles in implementation of the WLB idea (ad hoc management, lack of knowledge in the area of shaping activities concerning WLB, focus on profit in a short time, lack of strategic management, lack of formal representations of the employees' interests). The aim of the article is to present the results of authors' own research focusing on the conditions of WLB of SME's employees.

Keywords

work- life balance, human resource, SME

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1 Introduction: terminology issues of work-life balance

Changes in the functioning of the enterprises, influenced by various social and market factors, and changes in attitudes and social expectations of the employees make the companies look for the best possible solutions in the area of human recourses management (HRM). It is accomplished by extensive and complex procedures and tools used in the execution of the HR function. This can be seen especially in large organizations that have developed, formalized personal strategies to further the objectives taking into account the needs of the organization and employees as well. However in the case of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) personnel function is sometimes performed to a limited extent, often in an intuitive way. Management theorists and practitioners seeking new areas of impact on the motivation of employees recognized the importance of the work aspects, such as job satisfaction, commitment, organizational identity, loyalty and quality of life in the workplace (Czarnecka, 2014; Przewoźna-Krzemińska, 2014). These elements refer to the issue of balancing work and personal life of employees what is the subject of this study. The main aim of this article is to try to identify the key factors influencing the work-life balance (WLB) in SMEs in the light of authors' own research results.

The importance of the problems and challenges in a process of building proper relation between work and personal life progresses in the conditions of globalization, increasing competitive pressure, demographic and social changes, deregulation of the labor market, and especially in the face of a rapid technological development. A significant starting point for the analysis of the WLB is to assume that searching for optimal solutions and their implementation will be in the interest of the employers as well as employees. WLB refers to the workers' ability to decide how much time, where and when will they devote to the activities, so WLB can be understood as an equal distribution of time, energy and engagement in all the areas of life in a way that you achieve satisfaction in all of them (Kirchmeyer, 2000). The possibility of using the autonomy in the same area is referred to the issue of general life quality and

promoting of the quality of work and its conditions. (Michol-Zajda, 2008; Sadowska-Snarska, 2008)

A recent international research project (Dunay et al., 2015) examined the economic awareness and working attitudes of university students. According to the findings of this project, the family, health and friends are the most important factors of the general system of values of university students. When analyzing the system of values of work, the most important factors of work were the certainty of work and good salary, but the colleagues and the number of working hours were considered as very important as well. These results suggest that private life has a substantial motivating power for the young generation.

In the light of literature WLB is described as a state which is the closest to some optimum meaning satisfaction with reconciliation between the social and professional roles (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). This assumption neglects the fact that these relations are very dynamic. They change and are dependent not only on the individual needs of the employee, which evolve over time, but also on the changes in the environment. In connection with it, it is more reasonable to present work- life relationship as a constant process: balancing, harmonization, integration, matching, or reconciliation of the sphere of work with non - professional life. Dynamic approach to WLB also assumes that organizations must conduct uninterrupted monitoring of the needs and expectations of employees and must make changes in the organizational activities in this area. It should be noticed that balancing work with personal life is usually referred to the family responsibilities, especially responsibilities connected with the fact of having little children, that is why the notion of WLB is mainly addressed to women. However it should be noticed that striving for balance in the area of work and personal life refers to all the employees, regardless sex, age or marital status. This assumption implies a broad look on the discussed phenomenon, not eliminating any workers from the circle of interest (e. g. men, singles or elderly people). Their rejection from the discourse about the balancing of the discussed areas of life could be understood as discrimination. WLB assumes the possibility of realization of the needs and desires of all employees, both in the area of private and personal lives, in line with their expectations and interest and possibilities of the organization. Morover for the candidates for the employees the declarations of the potential employers concerning possibilities of meeting these needs and expectations are significant decisive factor in a process of employer's choosing.

2 Determinants of work-life balance in small and medium size enterprises

From the point of view of the organizations, keeping the balance between work and personal life of the employees allows to use the potential of the employees in the most efficient way. In this context a very significant issue is what kind of organizational activities should be performed in order to help the employees to keep the balance in a way profitable for the employees as well as the employers. Of course, these activities may be different in the different lifecycle stages of enterprises. Illés et al., (2012) suggested to analyze the enterprises and to identify the possible symptoms of danger in the form of a "corporate medical record", which might be a useful tool for company leaders, as it could be used at the different processes of management.

The argument for starting the activities fostering achieving of WLB is the fact that it results in measurable financial benefits. The employees who may achieve the work-life balance become more satisfied, which directly influences their productivity, absenteeism, cooperation and loyalty to the employer (Borkowska, 2004; Ratajczak, 2007). Moreover, activities supporting WLB of the employees allow to create positive image of the company as an employer, and in result allows to start cooperation with talented and valuable employees.

Recognition of the essence of the idea of shaping WLB by the organization require the use of certain financial expenditures and organizational development, from the HRM area. In a group of such organizational activities, being potentially the important instruments allowing to improve the quality of work and life, we may include WLB programs and family-friendly employment programs, which are directed to the employees having some family responsibilities. Implementation of the programs shaping the WLB is mainly dependent on the employer conviction that the programs may be useful and beneficial for the company. The employer should be also convinced that the construction of the program is faultless and acceptable.

It should be noticed that the organizational activities, based on a multifaceted WLB programs, including a wide range of benefits, are projects requiring financial outlays and organizational engagement. As a result they are organized mostly by large organizations, in a good economic condition, in which the organizational culture stresses the care for the employee. They require organizational engagement in the process of identifying the employees' needs and adjusting the potential organizational solutions to them. Such programs are therefore treated as a kind of an investment in the image of the organization as the employer.

For most of the SMEs such activities go beyond their organizational capacity, the programs become unavailable and as a result, the issue of balancing work with personal life becomes marginalized, or completely neglected. Especially for this group of the organizations stressing the role of social work environment (understood as shaping positive employee's relations (Kaczorowska-Serafińska, 2011; Korpus, 2006) as a factor determining the employees' WLB allows to take a low cost action in this area. Building of the positive relationships between the employees is connected with the necessity of understanding the importance of these issues by the company management and shaping the management skills supporting the

employees in a process of dealing with such problems. Therefore, this process should begin with raising awareness of the employees to the meaning of the WLB issue, next it should include shaping the managerial competence in this area, and finally, it should be reflected in the managers decisions, referring to everyday behaviors of the employees.

The mentioned above behaviors are connected with cooperation between the employees in terms of work organization and organization of the working time, allowing to play the professional and personal roles successfully. None of these actions require engagement of significant amounts of money. Moreover, in comparison with the static system solutions, such as work- life programs, shaping of the social work environment, which is sensitive to the workers' needs, allows to take individualized actions adequate to constantly changing employees' expectations. Very often only the employees' awareness itself about the employer's recognition of the worker's needs and about possibility to use the organizational solutions in a given area, has a positive influence on the sense of work- life balance. Therefore, the suggested solutions from social work environment are mainly intended for SMEs, and are the alternatives for formal solutions, such as work- life programs.

The results of the conducted researches show that what influences the sense of WLB in a significant way is the social work environment, understood as formal relationships connected with the hierarchical and task dependencies, as well as informal relationships, based on personal contacts between the employees (Robak and Słocińska, 2013).

Positive evaluation of the relationships with the supervisors and co-workers is a reflection of the overall functioning of the organization at the social level, in which an important and significant values are an employee and his needs, open communication, respecting of the workers' rights and friendly atmosphere in a workplace.

The research results confirmed the research assumption, that there are few factors which have significant influence on the employees' WLB. Firstly, there should be mentioned the supervisor's management style and the communication style. The open communication allows employees to communicate their needs connected with personal and professional life to the supervisor. It is connected with the fact that supervisors understand the personal and professional needs of the employee and at the same time employees represent assertiveness in terms of respecting his personal and professional needs and their defense in a situation of their threat in a workplace. Employees' aassertiveness in formulating their own needs is connected with the awareness and knowledge of the employee rights and its observance by the employer. The knowledge of the company objectives and the importance of the job performer for their realization also help employees to define their satisfaction level. Another factor which influence employees WLB is satisfaction with the atmosphere in a workplace and the relationships with the supervisors and co-workers. This relation reflects to worker's sense of safety connected with the possibility to get some help from the employer or supervisor in case of difficult life situations.

The employees satisfied with the relationships in their workplace show greater sense of harmony and control over their own lives. In the researches it is highly visible that the role of the supervisor and his management style in the process of shaping the employees' WLB is crucial. On the basis of the analysis of the collected data it may be concluded that there are the two main extreme types of enterprises: one type of workplaces in which the social work environment fosters WLB and the sense of high quality of work. The second type of workplaces includes enterprises in which the social environment has negative influence on this aspect of work. The results of a Hungarian survey confirmed that these processes are depending on the attitudes and behaviour of managers in the different lifecycle stages of their companies (Illés et al., 2015).

3 Methodology

Since 2010 the authors of the article have been working on various aspects of the subject of WLB. The questionnaire study conducted in 2012 allowed to analyze the generic issues in general, focusing on the role of supervisors in shaping the employees' WLB (Robak and Słocińska, 2012). The next research was conducted in 2013 on the group of 875 professionally active people from the areas of Silesian Voivodeship, Lódź Voivodeship, Lesser Poland Voivodeship and Masovian Voivodeship, employed in production, trading and service companies of various size (Table 1).

For examining the connection between variables it was used the chi-square test (χ^2) which lets verify the zero hypothesis about the independence of two variables X and Y, towards the alternative hypothesis, according to which the variables X and Y are dependent (Białek and Depta, 2010).

For the examination purpose 1200 employees were selected at random. From this sample 875 questionnaire forms correctly filled in were obtained. In the selection sample was used a method without returning. For testing assumption concerning random character of the sample was applied a test of series of the sample randomization, in which the zero hypothesis was being checked. Zero hypothesis regarded to the fact that the sample has random character, towards the alternative hypothesis which is saying, that the sample doesn't have random character (Domanski, 1990).

For sample drawn this way on significance level $\alpha = 0.05$ there were no grounds for rejecting the zero hypothesis, that the sample had random character ($p > 0.05$), and so it was possible to make an assumption about the randomization of the attempt.

Proving the hypothesis the survey has random character, authorizes putting forward a motion to the population with reference to the Silesian province.

Table 1 Characteristic of the researched employees N=875.

Factors	Total		Female		Male	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex	**875**	**100**	**534**	**61.0**	**341**	**39.0**
Age	**875**	**100**	**534**	**100**	**341**	**100**
under 24	291	33.3	175	32.8	116	34.0
25 - 34	247	28.2	145	27.2	102	29.9
35 - 44	158	18.2	117	21.8	41	12.1
45 - 54	154	17.6	81	15.2	73	21.4
55 and more	25	2.7	16	3.0	9	2.6
Education level	**875**	**100**	**534**	**100**	**341**	**100**
basic	8	0.9	4	0.7	4	1.2
basic professional	129	14.7	57	10.8	72	21.1
secondary	391	44.7	233	43.6	158	46.3
higher	347	39.7	240	44.9	107	31.4
Position	**875**	**100**	**534**	**100**	**341**	**100**
managers	83	9.5	51	9.6	32	9.4
specialists	168	19.2	103	19.3	65	19.1
workers	430	49.1	274	51.3	156	45.7
line managers / foremen	61	7.0	26	4.9	35	10.3
freelancers	85	9.7	44	8.2	41	12.0
others	48	5.5	36	6.7	12	3.5
Seniority	**875**	**100**	**534**	**100**	**341**	**100**
under 2	223	25.5	150	28.1	73	21.4
3 - 10	328	37.5	192	35.9	136	39.9
11 - 20	149	17.0	103	19.4	46	13.5
21 and more	175	20.0	89	16.6	86	25.2
Company size	**875**	**100**	**534**	**100**	**341**	**100**
micro	254	29.0	154	29.0	100	29.3
small	282	32.2	183	34.2	99	29.0
middle	165	18.9	92	17.2	73	21.5
large	169	19.3	101	18.8	68	19.9
two work place	1	0.2	1	0.2	0	0
lack of answers	4	0.4	3	0.6	1	0.3
Type of employment	**875**	**100**	**534**	**100**	**341**	**100**
permanent job	608	69.5	359	67.2	249	73.0
temporary contract	178	20.3	124	23.2	54	15.9
others	89	10.2	51	9.6	38	11.1

Source: own constriction based on own research

The research was based on surveys, in which the respondents were asked to approve or disapprove the statements, expressing their opinion between 1-5, where 1 was „totally agree", 2 „agree", 3 „neither agree nor disagree", 4 „disagree" and 5 "totally disagree". The research included division on micro-organizations employing 1-9 people, small organizations with 10-49 employees, medium-sized with 50-249 employees, and large ones, above 250 employees. The analyzed SME sector refers only to the personnel size factor and includes organizations between 1 and 249 employees.

4 The results analysis

In the surveys, the respondents were asked to specify their work – life balance. Considerable majority of respondents (67 %) confirmed to have WLB. 17 % had different opinion. 16 % could not give a definite answer. Considering the questions schemes relation to the respondents' employers sizes, we can notice, that micro and small companies' staff gave very similar answers (Fig. 1). Relevant is, that in small organizations there was a greatest percentage of respondents declaring to have WLB. Medium and large companies' employees were much more sceptical in this matter.
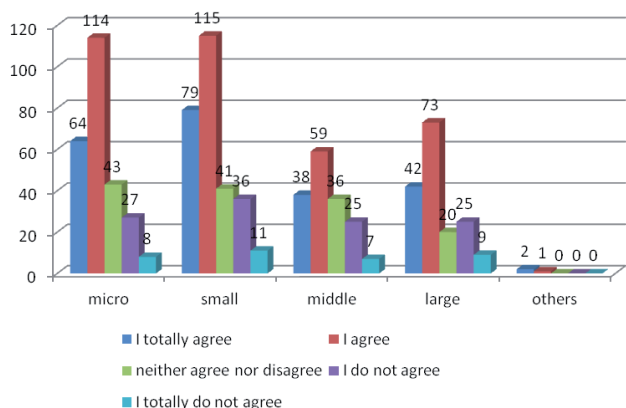

Fig. 1 WLB and size of employing organization N=875
Source: own constriction based on own research

The respondents were asked to define their control of time spent on career. Majority of choices contained „neither agree nor disagree" answer (36.22 %), which means, that in every day practice finding one's balance between professional and private life is difficult. When it comes to the organization size, we can confirm that large companies' employees were more likely to define their position as control of professional time (Fig. 2). Whereas small organizations' employees were the least satisfied of time invested in professional matters.

Putting those statements together results in a conclusion, that respondents' high WLB does not imply directly their time control in several life areas. According to previously mentioned Krichmayer's definition (2000), where WLB is related to the balance of time invested in several life areas, one may

say, that subjectively large WLB sensation is prevalently based on wishful attitude and is not based on any profound analysis.
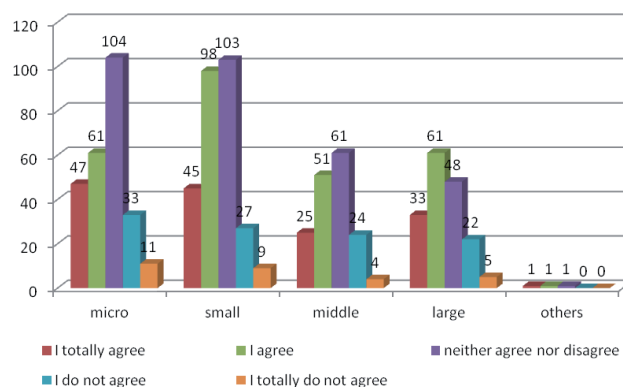

Fig. 2 Professional time control in relation to the organization size N=875
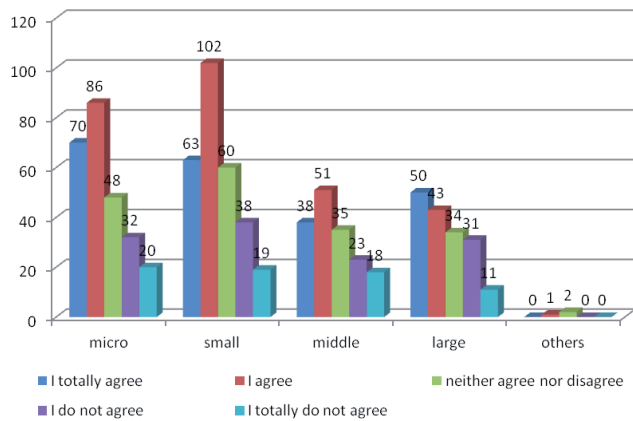Source: own constriction based on own research

Referring to the organization size, the differences in the respondents' WLB is seen. Micro and small organizations employees assessed their WLB as high, while medium organizations' staff estimated it as the worst. The best professional time control response was given by the personnel of small and large companies. Where the small companies' employees were relatively less likely to lose control in investing their time in work, than the staff of the different size organizations.

Reassuming, micro-companies' staff experienced relatively highest subjective WLB, while small companies' personnel proved to be the best in managing work time in their every day lives.

Considering the above, one may state, that SME employees do not constitute a homogeneous group, which may mean, that organizations of various sizes may differentiate their policies in this matter.

The respondents were also asked to define their level of vocational social rights and majority of them (79 %) estimated their knowledge in this aspect as high. Large companies' staff more often agreed with a statement: „I know my right very well". Medium companies' staff was the least aware of their vocational rights.

Then, the respondents answered the questions on their companies' vocational rights compliance in regular activity (Fig. 3). The answers did not optimistic picture of businesses activities, as only 57 % of respondents confirmed that their rights are respected and each fifth one confirmed that they are violated. The large companies' employees usually declare to have their rights respected, still large percentage of them complains on violations of their rights. This situation may result from the fact, that large organizations are often inspected by internal and external bodies, which enforces respecting of the employees' rights, still, their size creates the environment for organizational pathologies.

Fig. 3 Vocational rights and size of organization N=875
Source: own constriction based on own research

According to the respondents, the worst in respecting vocational rights were medium enterprises – the lowest percentage of employees confirmed to have their rights respected.

In the following research, the respondents were asked to define their ability to present their personal and professional needs to the employer. The respondents usually saw their abilities here as high, with personal needs manifestation skills at much better level than the professional ones. The large organizations' employees considered themselves as best in manifesting their personal needs, however, the same group contained the highest percentage of employees having no such competence. Such distribution of answers may indicate the occurrence of professional relations unfavorable for manifestation of the employees' private needs. In professional needs area, also the large companies employees assessed their skills as high. This, however, should be associated with professional development opportunities offered by large enterprises.

The abovementioned issues were rather positively assessed by SME personnel without rigid differentiation between micro, small and medium organizations.

Successive questions referred to the respondents' abilities to influent the superior personnel to respect their personal and professional needs. The respondents were much more sceptical in their abilities assessment here, particularly in private life area. One should stress however, that micro-enterprises employees were the most resourceful ones, which is confirmed by rich interpersonal relations and free communication with superiors, caused by close personal every day contact.

Large companies employees were relatively optimistic in their level of influence on superiors in respecting their needs, particularly professional ones. Such distribution of answers could indicate, that large organizational structure induces creation of smaller organization cells/teams, where their internal relations become similar to the ones experienced in micro-enterprises. This thesis is confirmed by the highest large companies' employees percentage claiming to be able to protect their personal needs in case, when they might be jeopardized.

The conclusion we get, is that SME sector, because of its personnel size is the most difficult social functioning formula in professional environment. Flat and simplified organizational structures makes major organizational segments rather crowded with employees, which makes personal integration more difficult. Moreover, managers usually coordinate many tasks simultaneously in these companies which consumes time which could be used for interpersonal integration, which is crucial for personal needs implementation.

The researchers focused gave particular attention on working environment, seen as employees' mutual relations, constituting significant support in one's WLB issues. The respondents were rather optimistic in assessment of their work emotional environment (58 %) , however, each fifth was sceptical in this matter. Work emotional environment was analyzed according to the organization size, which made the subject strongly diversified (Fig. 4). Micro and small companies' employees felt more comfortably at work, which was not the case for medium and large enterprises. According to WLB very important was to examine the relation to one's immediate superior. The results gained distributed similarly to work emotional environment (Fig. 5). This means, that micro and small enterprises' employees found themselves in best position (57 % of positive opinions), while medium businesses' staff felt worst in its relations with superiors. Interesting is, that the greatest number of extremely negative opinions on work emotional environment and relations with superiors were collected from large enterprises' personnel.
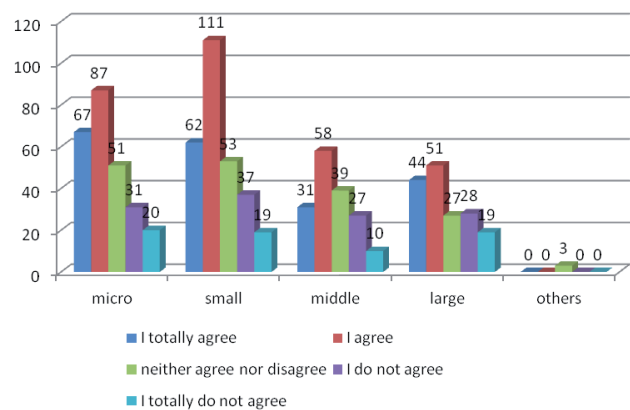
Fig. 4 Work emotional environment and organization size N=875
Source: own constriction based on own research

Although a conclusion may review the main points of the paper, do not replicate the abstract as the conclusion. A conclusion might elaborate on the importance of the work or suggest applications and extensions.

The relations with colleagues were assessed much better, even 74 % of positive opinions against 12 % negative. Important fact is, that this group proved to have different positive and negative answers distribution, than in previous two questions.

The best relations with their colleagues were admitted by small and large companies' employees (Fig. 6). This could confirm the previous conclusions concerning social interactions in large organizations, where developed structure makes employees organize in small teams with large amount of informal relations helping them in professional and private activities.
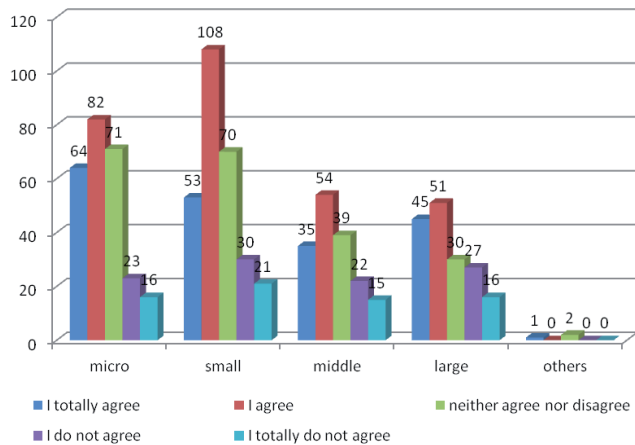

Fig. 5 Relations with immediate superior and organization size N=875
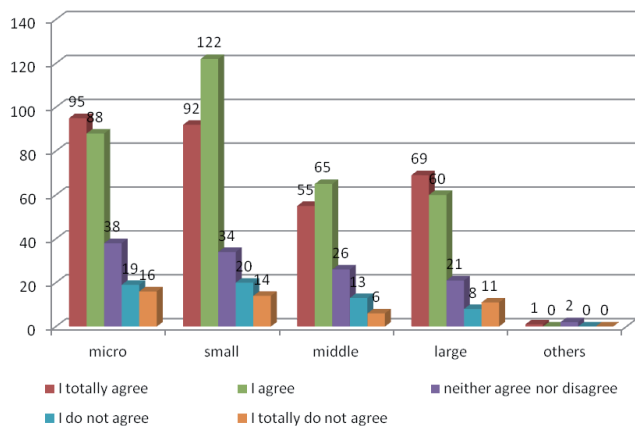Source: own constriction based on own research

Fig. 6 Assessment of relations between colleagues and organization size (N=875) Source: own constriction based on own research

The last group of questions consisted of issues on employers' and superiors' readiness to provide support to the employee in difficult life situations. The employees' opinions are not optimistic in that subject, even despite 46 % positively assessed potential will to help of their employers, and 44 % of their immediate superiors, every fifth respondent, in both questions, was rather pessimistic. Moreover, each third respondent was not sure of reliability of one's employer or superior in difficult life situations. Considering the questions distribution one may confirm, that it was another case when medium organizations' employees were the most sceptical in assessment of their superiors and employers. Micro-enterprises staff members were the most convinced that they could count on their employer's help, as he/she often was also their immediate superior.

5 Conclusion, limitation and future study direction

Reassuming the research helps us to notice, that analyzed SME sector is strongly diversified in its WLB response. The opinions collected helped us to determine a rule in personnel relations in micro, small and medium enterprises. The personnel internal relations influencing in strongest way the employees' abilities in maintaining work – life balance, were the most favorable in micro and small businesses. Meanwhile in medium enterprises, mainly because of large amount of employees, there were obstacles related to developed organizational structure, inflicting mutual direct contacts of personnel, with lack of respective policies aimed at positive personal relations enhancements on the other hand. Large enterprises, despite their large structures have quite systemised structures and initiatives aimed at supporting personnel internal integration. This influences positive opinions of these companies, in area of WLB.

In terms of WLB of SME employees, one may have a conclusion, that medium enterprises require particular attention and activities. Moreover, the large companies' employees were not particularly good in terms of WLB support by the employer, which indicates that personnel internal relations constitute the factor of WLB development, not the employer's direct activities. As professional environment is a vital factor of WLB generation, the medium enterprises managers should not be discouraged by fund shortages in their WLB support activity, instead they should focus on building positive relations with employees and their own managerial skills in this matter.

To sum up, in the analysis of the WLB issues as key organizational activities are indicated flexible forms and systems of work, that are part of the work-life programs. Such actions, although bringing many benefits, are only possible to implement in the form of formal solutions, primarily in large organizations. The specificity of SMEs restricts the use of these instruments of personnel management. However, the practice of SMEs operation indicates the broad potential for the development of WLB in the organization of working time arrangement's based on informal support arising from the social work environment. These activities do not require a large investment of financial resources and their effectiveness as they depend mainly on:

- perceiving the employees through their subjectivity;
- building of the open relationships between the employees;
- supervisor's management style;
- regular monitoring of the employees' satisfaction and identification of the aspects influencing its level;
- developing the employees' skills, especially in the area of communicating his WLB needs to the supervisors;
- shaping the awareness and knowledge about the employee rights and their execution by the employer.

These aspects certainly do not cover a broad spectrum of issues and problems concerning the development of employees WLB in SMEs. The complexity of the presented issues indicates the need for further research studies in this area to gain additional insight into the problem.

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